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Netherlands, The

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliamentary legislative system. The Prime Minister and a Cabinet representing the governing political parties (traditionally a coalition of at least two major parties) exercise executive authority. The judiciary is independent.

Regional police forces are primarily responsible for maintaining internal security. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The market-based economy was export oriented and featured a mixture of industry, services, and agriculture. The country had a population of approximately 16.2 million. Living standards and the level of social benefits were high. Unemployment was approximately 5.4 percent, with an additional 10 percent of the workforce on full or partial disability. Long-term unemployment, particularly among ethnic minorities, remained a problem.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Discrimination and some violence against minorities continued to be a concern. Trafficking in women and girls for prostitution was a problem. The Government took steps to deal with all of these problems.

Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles are two autonomous regions of the Kingdom; they also feature parliamentary systems and full constitutional protection of human rights. In practice, respect for human rights in these islands generally was the same as in the Netherlands; however, the islands' prison conditions remained substandard.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

There were sporadic incidents of rightwing and racist violence against religious and ethnic minorities (see Sections 2.c. and 5).

Prison conditions in the country generally met international standards. Male and female prisoners were held separately. In addition, juvenile prisoners were held separately from adults, and pretrial detainees were held separately from convicted criminals.

The Government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. The Council of Europe (COE) visited local prisons in February 2002 and the European Court for Human Rights in February. Both recommended changes at the maximum-security facility in Vught, which were implemented in line with the Court's ruling. The Court ruled that in one particular case, the combination of routine strip searches with other stringent security measures at the prison amounted to inhuman or degrading treatment.

The Government of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba made numerous improvements to prisons in staffing and capacity to address previous concerns by the COE's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Prison activities, health care, and amenities expanded, which lessened inmate tensions. Prisoners also are eligible for early release. Both Governments took steps to alleviate overcrowding. Aruba's KIA prison expanded from 250 to 300 places, Curacao added an additional 146 places, the Government Juvenile Institute added an additional 30 spaces, and the Rio Canario police detention facility, used primarily for narcotics offenders, added an additional 20 cells. Staffing on the island of Curacao also increased as 28 new prison guards were trained. Despite these improvements, problems remained. The police detention facility in St. Maarten remained the subject of frequent complaints concerning inadequate facilities and supplies. Because St. Maarten's Pointe Blanche prison was at capacity, detainees were held longer at the inadequate police detention facility than the 10 days permitted. Likewise, the two police detention facilities in Aruba received complaints related to overcrowding and irregular supply of basic provisions for detainees' comfort. The Kingdom continued to provide assistance to improve prison conditions and management. In September, it announced an exchange program between the KIA prison director and a counterpart in the Netherlands.

The Governments of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba allowed access by independent human rights observers to prisons; however, no such visits occurred during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions in practice.

Regional police forces are primarily responsible for maintaining internal security. The Royal Constabulary and investigative organizations also have specified responsibilities for internal and external security. The police were effective, conducting their investigations in a highly professional manner with due respect for the human rights of suspects. There were no indications of systematic police corruption or imputations of widespread improprieties. However, at year's end, the military police, which is responsible for Amsterdam Schiphol airport and border control generally, acknowledged that it had been investigating credible allegations of drug trafficking and corruption involving ground service personnel, customs personnel, and military police at Schiphol Airport.

Police officers, acting under the authority of the public prosecutor, conducted criminal investigations. A prosecutor or senior police officer must order arrests. Police officers may question suspects for a maximum of 12 hours and may detain a suspect for up to 6 days upon an order of the public prosecutor. If the prosecutor believed an investigation was necessary, he must request a preliminary judicial inquiry from the investigative judge, who then assumed responsibility over the investigation. Defense attorneys had the right to be present during any questioning.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The judicial system is based on the Napoleonic Code. A pyramidal system of cantonal, district, and appellate courts handled both criminal and civil cases. The Supreme Court acted as the highest appellate court and ensured the uniform interpretation of the law.

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. The law instructs that defendants be informed fully at every stage of criminal proceedings. In criminal trials, the law provides for a presumption of innocence and the right to public trial, to counsel (virtually free for low-income persons), and to appeal.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without government restriction. Internet access was available and unrestricted.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government provided subsidies to religious organizations that maintained educational facilities.

There was an increase in anti-Semitic incidents. The Center for Information and Documentation on Israel reported assaults, intimidation, and verbal attacks, perpetrated mostly by Moroccan youth. Windows of synagogues were smashed, and slogans or swastikas were painted on synagogues and other Jewish institutions. In addition, the outspoken anti-Israel sentiment among certain groups in society, such as the Arab European League and the Stop the Occupation movement, contributed to an anti-Semitic atmosphere.

While incidents targeted against Muslims, mosques, and Muslim institutions, including harassment, verbal abuse, acts of vandalism, arson, and defacing of mosques have declined since the end of 2001, some Muslims continued to face harassment and threats (see Section 5).

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. In 2002, the Government turned down 84 percent of the asylum requests that were processed. However, up to 30 percent of those whose applications were denied nonetheless were permitted to stay in the country temporarily on humanitarian grounds or for so long as their country of origin was considered unsafe.

The Government's asylum policy was designed to protect genuine refugees while excluding economic migrants and illegal immigrants. Because of this policy, the number of asylum seekers dropped from 43,000 in 2000 to approximately 18,500 in 2002. The Justice Ministry estimated that half of all asylum seekers came to the country via alien smuggling organizations. An April Human Rights Watch report regarding asylum policy and practice highlighted three primary areas of concern: The accelerated asylum determination procedure, which may result in inadequate review of individual cases; inappropriate treatment of migrant and asylum-seeking children; and restrictions on material support for asylum seekers pending final determination of their appeals. The Government maintained that every request was judged on its own merits and that each asylum seeker has the right of legal redress. In more than 90 percent of the appeal proceedings, courts sanctioned the decision made by the

Immigration Service. The Government also states that treatment of children was consistent with a protocol drafted in collaboration with various child protection bodies and that assistance to asylum seekers during the procedure followed European Union (EU) guidelines.

The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. Asylum seekers were permitted to apply for residence status, except those (approximately 60 percent) who came from a so-called safe country of origin or stayed for some time in a safe country of transit.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. These constitutional rights also apply to the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

Parliamentary elections were held in January. There were no restrictions in law or in practice that hindered the participation of women and minorities in government and politics. More than one-third of the 150 members of the second chamber of Parliament were female, as were 5 of 16 cabinet ministers. The Government pursued an active policy to promote the participation of women in politics and public administration. Although women were a minority, they also held positions in the parliaments and cabinets of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Several domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were very cooperative and responsive to their views.

The Government has a long tradition of hosting international legal tribunals, including the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and the headquarters of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of any of these factors or political preference as well as sexual orientation. Under the Equal Treatment Act, complainants may sue alleged offenders under civil law.

Women

Societal violence against women was a problem. According to government estimates, 20 percent of women ages 20 to 60 had suffered from physical violence in a relationship at some point in their lives, and an additional 2.4 percent had suffered from very serious violence. Only about 12 percent of cases were reported to the police, and complaints were filed in approximately 6 percent of the incidents. There were approximately 75 deaths annually from domestic violence. The maximum sentence for marital rape is 8 years' imprisonment. Spousal abuse carries a one-third higher penalty than ordinary battery. Societal costs caused by violence against women were estimated at \$188 million (150 million euros) per year.

In 2002, the Government launched a 50-point action plan to reduce and prevent household violence. The measures included increased sanctions on perpetrators, more assistance to victims, and a national awareness campaign aimed particularly at ethnic minorities.

Prostitution is legal if the person is 18 years of age or older and engages in the work voluntarily; however, organizing the prostitution of another person is a crime even if done with the consent of the prostitute. It is illegal to force a person into prostitution (see Section 6.f.). The Government reasoned that decriminalizing prostitution, licensing and establishing strict standards for brothel operators, and improving working conditions and health care for prostitutes, while at the same time prohibiting the employment of minors and illegal immigrants, would make prostitution less susceptible to criminal organizations trafficking in women and children. However, trafficking for the sake of prostitution remained a problem, despite strong government efforts to prevent it (see Section 6.f.). There were approximately 25,000 prostitutes, approximately half of whom were illegal immigrants from non-EU countries.

The law requires employers to take measures to protect workers from sexual harassment; however, a 2000 Social Affairs Ministry study estimated that 10 percent of female workers were sexually intimidated in the workplace each year. The Government funded an ongoing public awareness campaign and has taken measures to counter harassment among civil servants.

The law mandates equal pay for equal work, prohibits dismissal because of marriage, pregnancy, or motherhood, and provides the basis for equality in other employment-related areas. A legislatively mandated Equal Treatment Commission actively pursued complaints of discrimination in these areas as well as allegations of pay discrimination.

Although women increasingly entered the job market, traditional cultural factors and an inadequate number of day care facilities discouraged women from working. Female unemployment was approximately 6 percent. The social welfare and national health systems provided considerable assistance to working women with families. Women were eligible for 16 weeks of maternity leave with full pay. The Parental Leave Law allows both parents to take unpaid full-time leave for 3 months and to extend that leave for more than 6 months to care for children up to 8 years old. Persons working fewer than 20 hours per week also were entitled to parental leave.

The Social Affairs Ministry reported that women often were underemployed, had less chance of promotion, and held lower level positions than men, primarily because of their part-time work status. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, women working in the private sector on average earned 23 percent less than men, although, when adjusted for level of experience and expertise required for the jobs, this differential fell to 7 percent.

The Government provided affirmative action programs for women, and collective labor agreements usually included provisions to strengthen the position of women.

Children

The Government worked to ensure the well being of children through numerous well-funded health, education, and public information programs. Compulsory education ends at age 16, or after at least 12 years of education. Education was free for children between 4 and 16, although schools could ask for a voluntary contribution from parents. Vocational education was also free, except for the cost of books and materials. Approximately 10 percent of students left secondary school before attaining a certificate. Government-licensed Islamic schools were obliged to follow the same curriculum requirements as other schools.

According to the Child Abuse Reporting and Advisory Center (AMK), approximately 80,000 children were victims of child abuse each year, although only 25,000 formal reports of child abuse were registered in 2002. As a result of abuse, 40 to 50 children reportedly die each year. Most reports concerned physical abuse and affective neglect. According to the AMK, increased attention to the problem led to increased reports of victims, and therefore, longer waiting lists for assistance. The Government pledged to take measures to reduce waiting lists. The Council for the Protection of Children, which operated through the Ministry of Justice, enforced child support orders, investigated cases of child abuse, and recommended remedies ranging from counseling to withdrawal of parental rights. The Government also maintained a popular hotline for children and a network of pediatricians who tracked suspected cases of child abuse on a confidential basis.

The age of consent is 16. Sexual intercourse with minors under age 12 is a criminal offense. The Public Morality Act also allows for the prosecution of sexual abusers of children between the ages of 12 and 16 without requiring that affected parties file a complaint. The law imposes penalties on prostitution activities involving minors; maximum penalties are 6, 8, and 10 years' imprisonment for sex (in the context of prostitution) with minors under ages 18, 16, and 12, respectively. Under the law, citizens and persons having a permanent residence in the country who abused minor children in foreign countries could be tried and convicted even if the offense is not a crime in the country where it took place. In October, authorities used this law to arrest a businessman for child sexual abuse in the Gambia. By year's end, the case had not yet been brought to trial. Trafficking in girls for the purpose of prostitution was a problem (see Section 6.f.).

The maximum penalty for the distribution of child pornography is 6 years' imprisonment. The law allows for provisional arrest, house searches, and criminal financial investigations. The possession of child pornography was also punishable by law, but exemptions were made for scientific or educational use. Under the Public Morality Act, persons under the age of 18 were not allowed to perform in pornographic films. The Act also criminalizes the electronic manipulation of images of children for sexual purposes. The Government continued its campaign against child pornography on the Internet. The Child Porn Reporting Center reported 226 cases of Internet child porn to the police in 2002. In early December, police, as part of an international investigative effort, arrested two suspects for

internet child pornography and confiscated hundreds of CDs, DVDs, and videos. By year's end, these cases had not yet been brought to trial.

Persons with Disabilities

There was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services; however, according to the Dutch Council for Chronic Patients and the Handicapped, public buildings and public transport often were not easily accessible. Approximately 10 percent of the work force was on full or partial disability. The Equal Treatment Act of Handicapped People and the Chronically Ill, adopted in September and effective in December, requires the equal treatment of persons with disabilities and those who suffer from chronic diseases. The law bans discrimination of persons with disabilities in employment, education, and public transport.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The traditionally homogeneous nature of society has changed in recent decades due to the influx of immigrants and asylum seekers. Approximately 20 percent of the population (3 million persons) were of foreign origin, including 1.6 million who belong to ethnic minority groups, principally Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean. Government policies that were broad in scope and intent promoted the integration of minorities, and in general citizens supported integration and opposed discrimination and unequal treatment; however, integration remained a problem. Various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), some of which were funded by the Government, monitored violations. Incidents of physical assault against minorities were rare, but minorities, particularly Muslims, frequently were confronted with verbal abuse and intimidation and were denied access to public venues, such as discotheques.

Members of immigrant groups faced some discrimination in housing and employment. The Government has worked for several years with employers' groups and unions to reduce minority unemployment levels to the national average. These actions significantly reduced the rate of unemployment among ethnic minorities to less than 10 percent; however, the minority unemployment rate remained 3 times that of the ethnically Dutch workforce. The Labor Inspectorate oversees implementation of the law. Muslims also face continuing criticism for such perceived problems as the poor integration of Muslim immigrants into society, the high level of criminal activity among Muslim youth, and the conservative views of orthodox Muslims on topics such as women and corporal punishment.

The Government pursued an active campaign to increase public awareness of racism and discrimination. Civil and criminal courts, the Equal Opportunities Committee, the National Ombudsman, the Commercial Code Council, as well as the Council for Journalism, the European Court of Justice, and the European Human Rights Court addressed complaints about racism and discrimination. The majority of criminal cases concerned racist defamation. Civil lawsuits often concern discrimination in the supply of services, such as supplemental conditions for non-ethnic Dutch to obtain a mobile phone or to gain access to clubs. The Equal Opportunities Committee primarily addresses incidents of discrimination on the labor market, including discrimination on the work floor, unequal pay, termination of labor contracts, and preferential treatment of non-ethnic employees.

The police have a contact person for discrimination in each of the 25 regional police forces, a National Bureau of Discrimination Cases (which acts as a clearing house and database for police forces nationwide), and a national registration system of cases of racism and discrimination to provide a comprehensive database of such cases.

The Prosecutor's Office also has established a National Expertise Center on Discrimination that collects information, maintains a database on cases, and provides courses to prosecutors handling cases of discrimination. The government-sponsored National Association of Anti-Discrimination Bureaus, registered approximately 3,900 complaints in 2002, two-thirds of which were based on racial discrimination.

With the proliferation of Internet websites, the dissemination of racial and discriminatory material increased. The Discrimination on the Internet Registration Center registered 1,008 complaints in 2002. Most of the complaints concerned racist statements, and approximately one-third were anti-Semitic in nature. In many cases, the Center requested that the statements be removed from Internet, which usually happened. In more extreme cases, the Internet provider either issued a warning to the customer at the Center's request or blocked the customer's account. The most serious cases were reported to the public prosecutor, but convictions remained rare. The privately run Discrimination on the Internet Registration Center received 691 complaints in 2001, of which 370 qualified as unlawful discrimination, and 507 concerned racist statements. There have been only two convictions in the past few years for offenses committed that involved the Internet.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Workers are entitled to form or join unions of their own choosing without prior government authorization, and workers exercised this right. Membership in labor unions is open to all workers including armed forces personnel, the police, and civil service employees. Unions were free of control by the Government and political parties. Union members could and did participate in political activities. Approximately 25 percent of the work force was unionized; however, union-negotiated collective bargaining agreements usually were extended to cover approximately three-quarters of the work force. Membership of the white-collar unions was the fastest growing. There were three trade union federations.

Antiunion discrimination is prohibited, and there were no reports that it occurred. Union federations and employers' organizations were represented, along with independent experts, on the Social and Economic Council. The Council was the major advisory board for the Government on policies and legislation regarding national and international social and economic matters.

Unions were free to affiliate with national and international trade union federations. The three union federations were active internationally, without restriction.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Constitution provides for the right to organize, and specific laws provide for the right to collective bargaining; workers exercised this right. Collective bargaining agreements were negotiated in the framework of the so-called Social Partnership developed between trade unions and private employers.

Representatives of the main union federations, employers' organizations, and the Government met each year to discuss labor issues, including wage levels and their relation to the state of the economy and to international competition. The discussions led to a central accord with social as well as economic goals for the coming year. Under this umbrella agreement, unions and employers in various sectors negotiated sectoral agreements, which the Government usually extended to all companies in the sector. Collective labor agreements usually had one or more provisions to strengthen the position of women (see Section 5).

All workers have the right to strike, except for most civil servants, who have other institutionalized means of protection and redress. Industrial relations were very harmonious, and strikes were infrequent. In 2002, approximately 245,000 man-days (less than 1 percent of the total man-days worked) were lost due to strikes, mostly over union demands for higher pay. The law prohibits retribution against striking workers, and the Government generally respected this prohibition in practice.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 16 years. Those in school at the age of 16 may not work more than 8 hours per week. The law prohibits persons under the age of 18 from working overtime, at night, or in areas dangerous to their physical or mental well-being. The tripartite Labor Commission, which monitored hiring practices and conducts inspections, enforced these laws effectively.

Holiday work and after school jobs are subject to very strict rules set in the Work Time Act, the Child Labor Regulation (for children under age 16), and the Working Conditions Decree. The Social Ministry's Labor Inspection Office oversaw observance of the rules. Although child labor is banned, an increasing number of children worked for pay during holidays. Labor inspectors reported on the parents of such children, and the Public Prosecutor could prosecute the parents for violating the ban on child labor. In 2002, labor inspections found that almost half of companies violated the regulations applying to holiday work, including by employing children under the age of 13.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage for adults is established by law and can be adjusted every 6 months to reflect changes in the cost of living index. Over the last few years, the statutory minimum wage has been pegged to the average wage in collective labor contracts. The gross minimum wage was approximately \$1,560 (1,249 euros) per month. For workers earning the minimum wage, employers paid about twice as much in premiums for social security benefits, which included medical insurance. The legislated minimum wage and social benefits available to minimum wage earners provided an adequate standard of living for a worker and family. Only 3 percent of workers earned the minimum wage because collective bargaining agreements, which normally were extended across a sector, usually set a minimum wage well above the legislated minimum.

A reduced minimum wage applies to persons under the age of 23, one of the groups with the highest rate of unemployment, which was intended to provide incentives for their employment. This wage ranged from 34.5 percent of the adult minimum wage for workers 16 years of age to 85 percent for those 22 years of age.

Although the law sets a 40-hour workweek, the average workweek for those with full-time jobs was 38.7 hours. Anyone working more than 4.5 hours per day was entitled to a 30-minute break. This workweek resulted from agreements reached in collective bargaining on shorter workweeks, often in conjunction with more flexible working hours. The law prohibits employers from treating part-time workers differently from those in full-time jobs.

Working conditions, including comprehensive occupational safety and health standards set by law and regulations, were monitored actively and enforced effectively by the tripartite Labor Commission. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs also monitored standards through its Labor Inspectorate. Workers could remove themselves from dangerous work conditions without jeopardizing their continued employment.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law specifically criminalizes alien smuggling and trafficking in persons; however, trafficking in persons was a problem.

The maximum sentence for trafficking in persons is 6 years' imprisonment. In cases involving minors, severe physical violence, or organized trafficking, the maximum sentence is 10 years. The maximum sentence for alien smuggling is 8 years. Legislation was introduced to increase these penalties to those mandated for serious crimes and in conformity with U.N. and E.U. protocols. The Prostitution Law prohibits the employment of prostitutes under age 18 and equips the Government to fight trafficking in women and children.

The Government investigated and prosecuted traffickers. In 2002, authorities prosecuted approximately 217 trafficking cases, compared with 163 in the previous year. Between February and September, the Amsterdam and military police forces arrested 46 Dutch and Romanian nationals on suspicion of participating in a network of trafficking and forced prostitution; they allegedly recruited Romanian women and girls to work as waitresses and then confiscated the victims' passports and forced them to work as prostitutes. In July, a Breda district court sentenced the female manager of a sex club to 18 months in prison; the woman was accused of having smuggled at least 14 women, including 4 underage girls, from Eastern Europe, into the country and forced them to work as prostitutes.

The Government actively combated trafficking in persons. The Ministries of Justice, Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Welfare and Health, and Social Affairs were involved, and a number of local police forces established special units to deal with trafficking. A National Police team with authority over approximately 500 police focused exclusively on trafficking investigations and provided specialized training to police in how to identify and protect possible trafficking victims. The National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, an independent, publicly funded agency, reported annually to the Government on the nature, extent, and mechanisms of trafficking, as well as on the effects of national policies. In June, the Government gave first-stage approval to a bill expanding the definition of trafficking in persons to include all forms of modern slavery, including social-economic exploitation, and raising maximum penalties to 12 years' imprisonment in case of serious physical injury and 15 years in case of death. The bill must still be debated in Parliament. The Government also cooperated closely with other governments on trafficking, and EUROPOL, established in The Hague, provided analytical support and administrative expertise to law enforcement agencies on trafficking matters.

The country was a destination and transit point for trafficked persons. NGOs and the police estimated that the number of women and girls trafficked for the purpose of prostitution ranged from 1,000 to 3,600. The National Rapporteur estimated the number of trafficking victims at more than 3,500 in 2000. An estimated 70 to 80 percent

of victims trafficked into the country came from Central and Eastern Europe; lesser numbers came from African countries, primarily Nigeria, and from South America, Thailand, the Philippines, and China. In 2002, the Rapporteur reported that 608 trafficking victims contacted organizations offering assistance to victims.

Internal trafficking was also a problem. The National Rapporteur reported that approximately 25 police investigations in 2001 concerned internal trafficking. The victims were young, mostly immigrant girls, who were recruited internally by so-called "lover boys," primarily young Moroccans or Turks living in the country, who seduced them into prostitution. Local governments initiated a school campaign to warn girls of the danger of lover boys.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service reported the disappearance of youthful asylum seekers, particularly Angolan, Nigerian, and Chinese girls, from refugee centers who were later found in the illegal prostitution business. The Government has taken measures to combat this problem through better registration of asylum seekers and by placing young female asylum seekers in special shelters, and the problem was effectively eliminated.

A 2002 report of the Foundation Against Trafficking in Women listed Bulgaria, Nigeria, Romania, and Russia as the top originating countries for women trafficked to the country in 2001. A large number of African women, particularly Nigerians, worked illegally as prostitutes. According to the authorities, the most widely used method for trafficking African women was the fraudulent use of special asylum procedures for minors, who were virtually ensured entry. Most women trafficked from Africa claimed to be under the age of 18, although not all were. Once at the asylum center, they remained for a few days and then disappeared, only to turn up later as prostitutes in the country or elsewhere in Europe.

According to the Rapporteur's report, prostitutes from Central and Eastern Europe indicated that five out of six women liberated from trafficking organizations in the country knew that they were to be employed in the sex industry when they accepted the offer of their recruiters. However, they reported that, upon their arrival, they often were treated as slaves, physically abused, intimidated, threatened, and physically confined by their captors.

Under the law, illegal residents, who may have been victims of trafficking, may not be deported before investigations are completed. Victims were allowed 3 months to consider pressing charges, and victims who did so were allowed to stay in the country until the judicial process was completed. During this period, victims received legal, financial, and psychological assistance. In special circumstances, residence permits were granted on humanitarian grounds. After completion of the judicial process, illegal prostitutes were eligible for temporary financial assistance before returning to their native countries.

The Government subsidized NGOs working with trafficking victims, including the Dutch Foundation Against Trafficking in Women, which was an independent organization offering social support, legal advice, medical aid, shelters, and counseling to victims of trafficking.

The Justice Ministry co-financed the La Strada program, aimed at preventing trafficking in women in Central and East European countries. The Government made trafficking in persons a priority issue during its 2003 chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Other prevention initiatives included the Travel Agents' Association distribution of warnings about trafficking and sex with minors and public awareness campaigns aimed at tourists and travel agencies meant primarily to combat sexual exploitation of children.